

Elisha Janney House
404 Duke Street
Alexandria
Virginia

HABS No. VA-703

HABS
VA
7-ALEX,
159-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

ELISHA JANNEY HOUSE

HABS
VA
7-ALEX,
159-

Location: 404 Duke Street, Alexandria, Virginia (southwest corner of intersection with Royal Street)

Present Owner: Mr. and Mrs. Milton R. Greenland

Present Use: Residence

Statement of Significance: The monumental scale of this building is worthy of note and invites comparison with the earlier Jonah Thompson House on North Fairfax Street and the General Roberdeau House on South Lee Street. Completed by 1809, its Georgian heritage is unmistakable, but this mansion is of further interest for a number of transitional elements: the moulded brick cornice painted white, the vigorous Greek Revival doorway and the flagstoned vestibule--these latter two features being subsequent "improvements." The delicate "Regency" wrought-iron rails give added distinction.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: c. 1809

The chain of title for this building is closely interwoven with that adjoining at 408 Duke Street (see HABS report VA-696). Indeed the builder of the handsome corner residence at 404 first resided in the building which Dr. Elisha C. Dick lost by default. This fact can be established by the following:

NOTICE OF PUBLIC SALE in the Alexandria Advertiser and Commercial Intelligence, Wednesday, May 19, 1802, Vol. II, No. 446: . . . Five lots of ground on Duke Street from the corner of Pitt to an alley on the west side of the brick house now occupied by Elisha Janney . . .

The precise date of the building of Janney's new residence is revealed in the following advertisement from the Alexandria Daily Gazette--Commercial and Political, for June 20, 1809:

VALUABLE PROPERTY FOR SALE

Pursuant to a deed of trust made by Elisha Janney to the Subscriber . . . will be exposed to public sale at the coffee house, in Alexandria, on Monday, the 10th day of next month . . .

One half acre of ground, situate at the southwest corner of Duke and Royal Streets, on which there are two excellent brick dwelling houses, one of which is an elegant three story brick house built within the last year, finished in the handsomest stile (sic), and calculated to accommodate a large family . . .

2. Architect: Unknown
3. Original and subsequent owners: Elisha Janney was the first owner but his uncertain finances led in 1811 to the following notice of May 30:

FOR SALE, AT PUBLIC AUCTION

. . . the following VALUABLE PROPERTY, conveyed by Elisha Janney to the subscriber for the benefit of his creditors . . .

Two Dwelling Houses, on a Half Acre of Ground, at the southwest corner of Duke and Royal Streets. One of these is an elegant new building calculated to accommodate a large family.

The deed of Richard Marshall Scott to Thomas Janney, recorded in the United States Circuit, County of Alexandria on December 6, 1814, gives us the background. Elisha Janney had sustained a heavy loss by fire and in order "to render to his creditors all the Justice then in his power, for that purpose he together with Mary, his wife, by an Indenture bearing the date the twenty-ninth day of May one thousand eight hundred and nine conveyed all his estates, real and personal, and his outstanding debts unto the said Richard Marshall Scott in trust to sell the real and personal estates for the best prices which could be obtained and to collect his debts and with the money arising from the sales of his real and personal estates and the collection of his debts to pay the debts owing by him as by the said Denture directed, among the piece of real property so conveyed to the said Richard Marshall Scott is a half acre of ground described as lying upon the South side of Duke Street in the town of Alexandria, upon which half acre of ground there is erected a three story dwelling house with back buildings and a brick dwelling house of one story."

It further appears that Thomas Janney at the public sale in 1809 was the highest bidder at the price of \$5,800 for the three story dwelling and that the second parcel was struck off to Newton Keene as highest bidder for \$1,350. Since then Newton Keene disposed of his part to Thomas Janney "and directed the same to be conveyed to him by which the said Thomas Janney is entitled to the whole of the ground lying upon Duke Street of which the said Elisha Janney was seized." By this deed full title to the complete property passed to Thomas Janney for the payment of \$7,150.

Similar complex legalities surrounded the transfer of the property from Thomas Janney to Joseph Janney by deed recorded May 9, 1823 in the United States Circuit Court, County of Alexandria (Deed Book M-2, p. 357) and from Basil B. Hopkins to Joseph Janney by deed recorded November 15, 1826 (Deed Book P-2, p. 495).

Under the will of Joseph Janney, May 10, 1839, and proved in Baltimore, Basil B. Hopkins and Robert Hull, devisees in trust, sold the premises to Benjamin H. Lambert for \$10,500 in the deed recorded June 16, 1854.

Late in the nineteenth century, the ownership of 404 Duke Street was separated from the adjoining 408 Duke Street property.

In 1902, the National Florence Crittenton Mission acquired 404 Duke Street from the Lambert heirs and it was subsequently owned by Dr. and Mrs. Robert South Barrett. Mrs. Milton R. Greenland is daughter of Dr. and Mrs. Barrett, both deceased. She acquired the property in January of 1961.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

The Janney family were Quakers and prominent in the early years of Alexandria. Joshua Janney, probably a brother of Elisha, was a silversmith. Although a successful merchant, Elisha in common with so many of his commercial associates, appears to have been hard pressed for funds and his assets were heavily mortgaged from time to time.

C. Bibliography:

See HABS records for 408 Duke Street, VA-696; Alexandria Deed Books AA (United States Circuit Court, Alexandria County), p. 72; Vol. M-2, p. 357; Vol. P-2, p. 495; Q-3 (Alexandria County Court), p. 152; 48 (Alexandria Corporation Court), p. 105; Vol. 82, p. 196. Newspaper articles from the Alexandria Gazette as cited and Mutual Assurance Society of Virginia, microfilm records in the Alexandria Public Library.

Prepared by Worth Bailey, Consultant for
The Historic Alexandria
Foundation
January 1967
Edited by
Antoinette J. Lee
November 1975

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Elegant in an urbane architectural sense and plain speaking in the manner of its Quaker builder, this Federal row type mansion embodies generous size and subtleties of proportion and workmanship.
2. Condition of fabric: Excellent

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Three-and-a-half stories, finished attic, plus cellar, three-bay front. Main block approximately 30' x 35' with a flounder type extension about 60' in length and 20' in width. This ell has been remodelled into two attractive duplex apartments with two stories and attic.
2. Foundations: Rubble with L-shaped cellar which is unexcavated in southeast corner (under dining room), and which continues under portion of ell. Foundation generally 24 inches in width--with reduction to 18" to 20" for east wall, reinforcing belief that this was originally conceived of as a party wall for a companion building. A brick cross wall continues abovestairs and through three floors to form masonry partitions. Concrete footings reportedly date from 1923 when the cellar was deepened and the foundations reinforced.
3. Wall construction, finish, and color: Pressed brick laid in Flemish bond on front facade where the masonry, especially the gauged arches of the windows, is of superb workmanship. Common bond has been used elsewhere.

The east facade of the ell is plastered, undoubtedly with intent to unify a number of basic components. It is possible that this section incorporates Dr. Dick's brick smokehouse.

4. Porches, stoops, bulkheads: Modern enclosed tiered porches at rear. Side porch with deck, removed 1965.

Basement entrance from street formerly located at southeast corner of building as revealed by brick steps in cellar. Exterior concealed by later brickwork.

In the cellar of the ell, in what formerly was the cellar under the kitchen, occurs evidence for similar access. The original well is located in this area.

5. Chimneys: Two chimney stacks connected by a curtain centered with the ridge of the roof dominate the east end of the house. A second chimney in the ell undoubtedly serviced the original kitchen.

6. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: The pedimented doorway in Greek Revival style is in all likelihood a later improvement, along with the creation of the vestibule. In fact, the flat ogee mouldings appearing in the jambs are repeated in the inner doorway (new door) and baseboards to match the nineteenth century interior doors of the first floor. Nor does the construction provide any masonry support for the flagstone paving and the steps are cement rather than stone. In the construction of the vestibule the hall cornice of plaster remained intact and the return made across the partition with wood.

Incidentally, an inner transom repeats the design of the frontispiece.

The well-designed double door with elliptical arch and sidelights which now graces the rear porch, was re-located from its original location in the hyphen.

- b. Windows: Original six-over-six light double-hung sash occurred front and back. The east end is believed to have been built without openings and those with wood lintels now in place are thought by the owners to date about 1875. On the west side a few modern windows have been installed to lighten the hall, stairway, and kitchen.
7. Roof: Gable with end parapets, covered with slate. Paired dormers, front and back with arched sash. Ell roofed in tin with raised seams, pair of dormers with six-over-six sash; parapets along west wall and at south end.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: Wide side-hall with stairway in the rear, ascending by two flights between floors, to the attic. The principal rooms consisting of parlor and dining room to the left. The hyphen which originally connected with the ell is now a modern kitchen, which borrows space from the adjoining old kitchen. From this area descended the original stair to the cellar. The first stair landing gave access to the upstairs of the ell, but the space above the modern kitchen, and corresponding in size to it, satisfies the needs of a modern bathroom.

The "Long Room" extends across the entire second story, providing a library and retreat of stately elegance. Above stairs the basic plan is two bedrooms flanking the hall and small rooms at the front of the house.

2. Wall and ceiling finish: The plaster cornices downstairs and in the hall and library upstairs are of special interest and distinction. The ceiling medallions--a scallop motif in the parlor and rosette in the dining room are notable details.
3. Doorways and doors: Six panel doors with recessed panels. Doors to principal rooms replaced in the late nineteenth century. Original opening between these rooms reportedly a large arch, recently modified to double doors based on original woodwork.
4. Special decorative features, trim and cabinet work: Simple chair rails and mouldings with sunk panels; folding shutters at original openings. Original mantel in parlor, all others appropriate replacements.

Most unusual interior detail is the archway which sets off the stair, coupled and fluted columns on pedestals, arch-volt ornamented with bead moulding. Stair altered in the late nineteenth century with newel and turned balusters as far as the second floor; otherwise unchanged.

D. Site:

The house faces north on Duke Street with the long east facade facing the adjoining garden along Royal Street. This area is enclosed and attractively landscaped with flower beds, small trees, and shrubbery, for privacy and pleasant living.

Prepared by Worth Bailey, Consultant for
The Historic Alexandria
Foundation
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Mr. Milton R. Greenland
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PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was a cooperative effort of the Historic Alexandria Foundation and the Historic American Buildings Survey to document some of the most important early Alexandria residences for the HABS collection. The historian was Worth Bailey, an Alexandria resident and former HABS employee. Photographs were supplied by Victor Amato. The material was edited in 1975 by Antoinette J. Lee, working on contract for HABS.